

Sila Aransae 1824. ND9

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Experimental inquiry
into
the Medicinal Power

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by
George P. Preply
of
South Carolina

Dated March 8th 1824

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Experiments on the Cob-Web.
 There has been, for a considerable time past, a sort
 of popular tone of confidence reposed in the Medic-
 inal powers of the spider's web. The question how-
 ever not being decided in the minds of practitioners,
 I thought it not less instructive than important
 to endeavour, if possible, by some experiments to sa-
 tisfy myself, in relation to this unsettled inquiry.

After perusing Dr Robert Jackson's detailed account of the cob-web, in which such high
 commendations are lavished upon it, and which are
 to a certain extent corroborated by the concurrent
 testimony of some of the most experienced practitio-
 ners. I was not a little predisposed in favour of this
 article, and disposed to consider it as a valuable
 acquisition in the list of our remedial resources.

Very frequently hearing physicians speak of

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the difficulty they so often experience in the cure
of Intermittent fever, by the ordinary modes of
treatment recommended in that disease, I was not
a little surprised, that they never resorted to the cob.
wh. since Dr. D'istol Jackson positively pronounces
it as preventing the recurrence of the febrile paroxysms
of Intermittent fever, more effectually and more
safely than bark, arsenic, or any other
remedy employed for that purpose. To me it
appeared evident, that this neglect could not arise
from any scarcity of the article, or difficulty
in procuring it, since its very plentiful distribu-
tion, even within the precincts of the meanest cottage,
renders it acceptable to every one who will take
the pains to collect it. Not yet from any
disagreeable or deleterious effects arising
from its use, since, it is said to operate by
producing feelings of delight and pleasure
rather than pain and suffering.

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The hilarity and slighter state of feeling arising from the administration of this remedy, however well associated by some with the sensations rising from a draught of the Nitrous oxide gas. From this view of the article, it would appear to have a specific mode of action in the cure of disease, peculiar to itself, and giving it a decided preference to most articles in the Materia Medica; as the Modus Operandi of most medicines, perhaps, I might make no exception, at least the primary effect produced is a sense of nausea sickness, or disorder, in some, according to the nature of the article administered, instead of animation and cheerfulness.

To satisfy myself as to the real merits of the Spiders-hub. I commenced my experiments in a system of health where there was, where the functions were unembarrassed by diseased associations, and

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subsequently by administering it in a system morbidly disturbed by diseased associations.

To guard against any defect in the web I took the precaution to select it myself. I prepared a small quantity which I considered, from the directions upon the subject, to be the best. I collected in a wash-
cellar, that which was the production of the black spider, and after forming it into pills, which was effected with facility by adding to the mass a little mucilage of Gum Arabic, I commenced by taking three grains myself, waiting for near fifty minutes without any perceptible alteration in my pulse or state of feeling; I took five grains more, and in a few minutes repeated the dose; I had now taken thirteen grains, and not observing the slightest effect I at once began to suspect that I had been deceived in procuring the genuine species of the web.

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Getting intelligence of an apothecary who had
been accustomed to prepare the root, and who was
well acquainted with the best kind, I called upon
him and requested him to prepare me some. He
readily did so, and assured me that he
gave me the genuine species, which distinction from
the appearance of the root presented I thought
was evident. I was now confident in my own
mind that I should experience some very decided
effect from its use. My stomach being empty,
I took four grains which I repeated very frequen- }
tly, until in the space of two hours, I had
taken near forty grains. I examined my pulse
frequently but there was not the least variation,
either in my pulse or general feeling. My astonish-
ment was now not a little excited and I began
for the first time very strongly to suspect the medi-
cal powers of the article; still I was far from being willing
to prescribe our medicine as substitute of

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any virtue, as medicines operate very differently in opposite states of the animal economy, more especially in a system, where instead of the regular movements of healthy, purified and morbidly deranged associations have taken the sway.

As the powers of the spleen have been more especially extolled in the cure of Intermittent fever. I now felt very anxious to test its powers in that particular disease.

Dr Samuel Jackson, one of the attending physicians in the Philadelphia Almshouse, very politely let me have the management of some of his patients, and on these patients I commenced its use.

Case 5th Intermittent

fever, of the tertian type, of recent standing.

The patient was ordered an Emetic, and after the operation of which, his tongue being clean and free from any sickness of stomach, I thought the case fair for the use of the spleen-wash.

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I administered one scrupule every four hours during the intermission, and continued this course for six days, but without the slightest advantage. The stools returned as regularly as they had previously done, every other day, and with rather increasing violence.

Case 2nd Intermittent fever of the quotidian type. I first prescribed an Emetic, and after the complete evacuation of the contents of the stomach, I gave the Abt. Twenty grains every four hours was regularly administered during the intermission. It persisted in its use for near a week, yet still the paroxysms recurred every day with their usual regularity.

Case 3rd Intermittent fever of the quotidian form. The stomach and alimentary canal being thoroughly evacuated of their contents, by an Emetic and cathartic, I commenced the use of the col-Abt., in the same dose as in the preceding

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easy. I continued its use for five days, but had not the fortune to make the least impression upon the disease.

In one of these cases, I gave the wine in four grain doses every hour, and I anticipated the recurrence of the paroxysm, by augmenting the quantity considerably, but still it proved infinite-
ly too feeble. In each of these cases I paid partic-
ular attention to the pulse, and frequently inter-
rogated my patients in respect to their feelings. I
could, however, perceive little or no variation in the
pulse, nor were they sensible of any change of feel-

^{ing} The exhibition of spirits, sparkling eye, and temporary animation of countenance, described by Dr Robert Jackson, if present in my patients, entirely eluded my observation. The secretion of the kidneys, I could not perceive to be either increased or diminished, the surface was not more

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relaxed than usual, and the sweating stage was not prolonged, or the purgative fluid rendered by any means, particularly copious. I was also particular attention in watching if it have any specific tendency, but I could not discover that my patients inclined to sleep, any more than other patients in the same ward.

After the use of this medicine for two or three days, one of my patients complained of uneasy sensations in his Stomach, but this I was inclined to suspect was only imaginary, or a patient to prevail upon me to discontinue its use, as he had lost confidence in the medicine, and wished to take something else.

It perhaps may be thought strange, that I should consent with so large a dose of the medicine, inasmuch, as the quantity usually recommended does not exceed five or six grains X.
my fourth or fifth hour. But, as I have previously

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sly taken it myself to a considerable extent in
a short time, I was confident no delirious conagu-
ances could be apprehended from the quantity given;
and besides I was anxious if there was any virtue
in the article it was necessary to make such an
impression on the system, as to check the disease
in its birth. That my total use of the medicine
did not produce any over degree of action is obvious,
measur'd as the pulse and feelings of the patients
are not affected.

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As the herb has been recommended
as a substitute for Opium, and even been
considered as superior to that invaluable article,
calming the turbulence and irritability of the
frame, where the nervous system is much
affected, and in restoring tranquillity and sweet
repose for restless and sleepless nights, I thought
it important to try its powers in some cases of
this description. In the ward in which I

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attended, there were two cases, which I was induced
to suppose might obtain great relief from this medicine,
if the above views were correct. One of these patients
was a middle aged man, a convalescent from
Dysentery, but who, from disturbance, particularly
of his nervous system, could not sleep ^{any} through
the night. I gave him near forty grains of the root
root in the evening, but in the morning I was disapp-
pointed, after enquiring, to find that he did not
get any rest. The subsequent night, the medicine
was repeated, though not to the same amount, yet
still without the slightest advantage.

The other case, was a man of about thirty
five, a convalescent from Rheumatism, and who
was affected with symptoms very analogous to the
preceding case. I gave him a scruple of the
root at night, and this affording no relief, it was
repeated the subsequent evening, but my patient
still remained a stranger to natural sweet rest.

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It may be proper here to state that those cases of Intermittent, in which the opium-wm was used with no effect, were completely cured very soon after it was discontinued by a preparation of the bark.

That patients

labouring under Intermittent fever have recovered while under the use of the col-wm, testimony of the highest character, has most unquestionably shown, but does it hence necessarily follow, that these cases were affected by any Medicinal power, inherent in the article? To me this appears extremely problematical. With a mind most unscientifically free from the least semblance of prej-
udice I commenced my experiments, which were conducted with all possible fairness, care & candour, and the result of which has been to give it a very
quickeal share of confidence at least in my
mind. The Yela France is an article which
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able to arrest the febrile paroxysms, even of a common
intermittent fever. After the authority of such
a man as the learned and experienced Jackson,
it may no doubt be deemed the breathings of an
imagination bordering upon insanity, for a youth,
who has never entered upon the duties of his profess-
ion, to represent the article in this a light. But,
as we have remedies of known and tried powers,
I must consider the man who pertinaciously
persists in the use of this article to the exclusion
of all others, to be sporting with the health and
even life of his patients. Though Intermittent
fever in itself is not generally considered of any
very serious import, yet, when neglected, or ill
managed, it so prostrates and paralyzes the energy
of the constitution, as to pave the way for the
most obstinate diseases. For instance, what physi-
cian of ordinary experience does not trace an
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rekinless Liver, an inveterate Spleen to neglected
will treated Intermittent in the language
of a distinguished physician Let resuscite friends
be the motto of every indisposition

Inasmuch as I could
not effect a single cure, it may be asked, in
what measure I am to explain its Modes of operation
in those cases reported to have been cured by
its use? To me this appears by no means im-
eligible. May it not operate entirely by the strong
sensations produced on the mind, at so disgusting
remedy? In confirmation of this suggestion
which may, no doubt be considered as wholly
gratuitous, who has not heard of the paroxys-
ms of Intermittent fever being completely
suspended by sudden passions or emotions of the
mind, as Joy, surprise, anger, or even extreme
solitude Nothing is more common I have
been informed in some parts of the world

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as a remedy in Intermittent, than the use of some species of insect; This is swallowed by the credulous sufferer an hour or perhaps a shorter period before the recurrence of the expected paroxysm, which it entirely prevents.

In the mind of every true and worthy physician there must be diffused a feeling of sympathy for the sufferings incident to the feeble constitution of our species, together with a correspondent zeal and determined resolution to call to his aid in combatting disease, in all its sinewy shapes and features, all the means in those only, to which the test of experience has given the stamp of utility. In the bosom of such ^{by whom} there must exist a latent spark of genuine love, which must burst into a flame of ecstasy and joy, at the expulsion of an article, which has so long been imposed on the credulity of the profession.

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